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ABSTRACT

Current performance objectives of a field-based reading education program and factors which influence their selection and revision are presented in this paper. The role of teacher educators in the determination of performance objectives for field-based course work is discussed. It is suggested that the teacher-educator must draw on experiences and recommendations of inservice programs, personal experiences and observations, and needs of children in the school where field-based work is being done, as well as on lists of performance objectives and teaching competencies which are available through the literature. The responsibility of the university professor in a field-based reading program is presented. It is suggested that the professor provide the preparatory teacher with a series of carefully selected experiences that make a real difference in later teaching performance. Also discussed is the importance of an open forum atmosphere in which the performance objectives and the experiences of the college student are freely discussed and evaluated. (WR)

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Toward Defining Performance Objectives of a Field Based Reading Education Program

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Toward Defining Performance Objectives of a Field-Based Reading Education Program

Whether the change is induced externally or internally, the nation's classroom teachers and teacher educators mutually experience the push and pull which is a part of all educational change. Today some of the "push and pull" words in education and teacher education are "relevant experiences," "performance-based programs," "competency-based certification," and "accountability." While they mean different things to different people, and consequently in application may appear formidable or even dangerous, there are few involved in professional education who would not agree to their basic, underlying concepts. Each of them has emerged because another step needed to be taken toward responsible education of today's children. A major question which they prompt, however, is how teacher education programs are developed which incorporate the best from the movements associated with these words, and thus produce better teachers. Given the pressures which already exist for teachers to be "all things to all people," more direct questions for those who are involved specifically in reading education are: Taking into account the demands today on classroom teachers and their time and energy, and the beliefs, experiences, and resources of university personnel, how a reading education program may be developed which places the undergraduates in a "relevant" environment and provides maximum opportunities for their growth? Given a relevant environment, what is it that the undergraduate should learn to do? Which specific competencies should he or she

develop? Which are the more critical? Who should decide this? How will competence in them be measured? The deeper the probing, the more complicated the questions. As is true with all complex human goals, the general direction is reasonably clear to the people involved in making the decisions; the details of how to get there are very much a matter of debate.

An Operational Model

There is evidence in the literature that to change a reading education program the persons involved must begin by deciding the over-all objective and the operational model through which they will work. Detailed objectives should also receive attention, but evolve over a period of time. Thus a total program "conversion model" at the outset is of questionable wisdom (3). Accordingly, several years ago at Georgia State University reading faculty established that work would be begun toward the development of a field-base' undergraduate reading education program. The over-all objective was a working model of a successful reading education program in which local school faculty, university students, and university professors would mutually work and benefit. Emphasis would be on the undergraduate obtaining direct experience in helping children read successfully, thus developing professional competence while at the same time providing help for the teachers and children with whom he or she was involved.

It was decided to begin by offering the undergraduate course in reading methods and the course in assessing progress in basic school subjects

together in a block-of-time arrangement, and in a local school setting. Other sections of these courses would for the time being remain on-campus and be taught in a more conventional manner. Field-based students would spend four mornings a week in a school, one half of each devoted to work in the reading and language program of the school, the other half to class presentations and discussions.

Initial teaching/learning objectives were drawn up, and what came to be known as the "reading block" was implemented.

Definition and Refinement of Objectives

The first several quarters during which the reading block was offered revealed a need for continued work on the development of the teaching/learning objectives of the course. A great deal of time is required of the field-based student, as it likewise is of the school faculty and the professor involved. The work associated with some of the early objectives was judged by all to be of less importance than the amount of time being devoted to them in the course. Revision was needed.

Requests were also made for more arranged planning time between classroom teachers and college students, and for more of the performance objectives to relate directly to the work being done in the classroom. Very gradually, what has been called a coalition of efforts in designing specific teaching/learning objectives began to develop, and the local school became,

more than just an apprenticeship center, a lab for learning about teaching (3). With this change, it became more reasonable to evaluate the performance of the college students by primary criteria---that is, in terms of the program's direct effect on their performance or behavior (2). The interrelationships of the work which needed to be done at the school and appropriate performance objectives for the students became clear.

Still, there was difficulty in articulating the objectives satisfactorily. Faculty were trying to identify a group of objectives which, in summation, represented a balanced and comprehensive reading education and educational assessment learning experience, but often found their objectives too broad, having too many unmentioned components, and essentially unmeasurable. Yet when trying to adjust them, they sometimes found they were tapping only mechanical aspects of teaching, rather than what seemed to be the essence of the job. A by-product of this was that too many decisions were being made totally for the university students.

The work of Gronlund (4) came to the faculty's attention and proved helpful. In his material he cautioned that a strict one-to-one relationship between the behavior taught and the behavior tested is characteristic of the training level and is useful only for teaching the simplest skills and the lowest levels of knowledge. His recommendation was that the first step in instructional planning should be to state general instructional objectives, then to clarify each objective by listing samples of the specific

behaviors which are acceptable as evidence of the attainment of that objective. In view of the fact that the needs of specific children and the strengths and weaknesses of the individual university students clearly suggested the need for alternative ways of satisfying certain of the learning objectives, the structuring of course objectives was changed along the lines suggested by Gronlund.

In addition to the difficulties in articulating objectives in a realizable manner, an even deeper concern arose over the question of what constitued appropriate evidence to use in evaluating the performance of a student in relation to certain objectives. To what degree and how well something was done, what "adequate" meant, was easily applied to the more simple of the teaching behaviors, not so easily to tasks as complex as extending the language of children or creating an environment which motivated reading. Faculty found, as has Foster (1), that the problem had many facets. There did not realistically seem to be a way to avoid interpreting the performance of the student in terms of certain "givens," and in terms of qualitative differences in performance.

Other Variables

While university faculty, classroom teachers and students learned together about teaming their teaching efforts and refining performance objectives other factors presented complications:

(1) There was, despite attempts to eliminate less essential objectives, a constant struggle due to a lack of time to accomplis all of the work which needed to be done. To obtain maximum benefit of the work, students also needed more time to talk with the classroom teachers with whom they were working.

(2) Differences in personalities of the people involved and in available physical facilities sometimes influenced which objectives realistically could be met.

(3) What Gentry and Johnson (2) call "interface conflicts," or the variance in the policies of two or more systems and their means of control, developed. Sometimes objectives or restraints of the local school prohibited the students' freedom to try certain approaches and to break from the usual program. Some local faculty and children found it difficult to adjust to the shifts in the students each quarter, and to the time when none were there at all between quarters.

While they did not prevent the program from developing and improving, factors such as these did create moments of strain for the persons involved, and at times required a re-interpretation of the performance objectives of the course.

Summary

The reading education faculty at Georgia State University and the Atlanta schools personnel who have been working together in this program concluded that the derivation of a workable set of performance objectives for field-based reading education is a process which by its very nature cannot become static. Changes in the personnel involved, in materials and space available, and even in the particular quarter of the school year in which a field-based course is taking place, create variance in the laboratory situation in which the undergraduates students find themselves, and thus influence which objectives are appropriate at that time. Differences in the students themselves likewise influence this. Certain general instructional objectives may be relatively constant across quarters and groups of students, but specific objectives or designation of acceptable behaviors which relate to the general objectives are not appropriately pre-determined. This accounts for the fact that it would probably be of limited value to recount in this paper the specified block objectives of even the most recent quarter, just as it is inappropriate, though they are available, to send off for a set of mail-order objectives for field-based reading education. Faculty who wish to work jointly with the public schools, in a relationship in which they assist them in the very difficult job they have to do, and secure at the same time relevant settings for undergraduate students' reading education, must be willing to accept the responsibility for continued review of, and work on, performance objectives

for their students. They must be willing to adjust the objectives on the basis of short and long term feedback from the classroom teachers and students involved. While it is a slow and somewhat tedious process, it seems that this "process" is an essential part of developing a comprehensive, and responsive, field-based reading education program.

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2. Gentry, Castelle and Charles Johnson. A Practical Management System for Performance-Based Teacher Education, PBTE Series: No. 15, American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, 1974.

3. Giles, Frederic T. "Changing Teacher Education: An Administrative Perspective," Changing Teacher Education in a Large Urban University, PBTE Series: No. 6, American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, 1972, 1-23.

4. Gronlund, Norman E. Stating Behavioral Objectives for Classroom Instruction. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970.